POEMS

1916

A. B. H.

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CONTENTS.

Onward.

Woman's Share.

The Coward.

The Letter.

Somewhere in France.

Sacrifice.

Our Captain.

Afterwards.

In Hospital.

The Mother.

The Mystic.

Meeting Again,

ONWARD

O CANADA, the blood of all thy sons
Cries out, to-day, from fair and glorious deeds!
And spirit legions of Immortal Ones,
Who died to serve their country and its needs—
Pledge thee, anew, by their white Honour Roll,
To loftier issues, born of sacrifice;
Bidding thee keep unstained that nobler soul,
Which they have ransomed at so great a price.

WOMAN'S SHARE.

So tall and straight he looked, my lad,
The day they marched away—
And Oh, my heart was proud and glad,
Because I heard him say;
"We'll teach those fellows they must not forget
England is England yet!"

So brave and strong he looked, my dear,
As they swung down the road—
I could but smile, though cruel fear
Laid on my heart its load.
"All the King's horses and all the King's men....
Never again. Never again...."
Why should it come to me at such a time,
That queer old rhyme?

Now, in a foreign land he lies—
And, though I proudly fare,
The very sun from out the skies
Seems buried with him there.
Ah, well, I've given England all I had;
My life—my lad!

THE COWARD.

I DON'T know what I seen, or done—
I only know I had to run;
And, if in running, I'd been shot,
The name of hero I'd have got.

But, now, my glory days are dead—
And I am branded *coward,* instead,
Because a something, with my name,
Drove me, from hell, to lasting shame.

Funked it? No, that could never be,
The man that done it wasn't me.
God! Shoot me now! I fear no gun....
I don't know what I seen, or done—
I only know I had to run.

THE LETTER

HE took it from the pocket of his coat
And kissed it, just before he fell asleep.
I saw—and something rising in my throat,
Came pretty near to making this fool weep.

Strange, how a trifle wakes such cruel pain!
It seemed to stab and break my heart, well-nigh,
To think she'd never see his face again
Whilst I must live who only prayed to die.

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE.

I HEARD him say "Our Father," in his sleep.
The place was far too narrow to turn round—
He lay, stretched flat, upon the oozy ground—
One of the common many in the heap.

The night was still, and, as I heard, it seemed
Those little words a kind of comfort brought;
'Twasn't so easy, doing our bit, I thought—
But, maybe, God was nearer than we dreamed.

SACRIFICE.

A WHILE before he died he took my hand—
"I want to tell you something, Bill," he said,
"Before you lay me out in No Man's Land,
And put a wooden cross above my head.

"Just this; last night, when lying here, I knew
I'd found my soul, Bill, since the War began—
And I was happy....some day, when it's through,
And you're back home—just tell Her that, old man."

OUR CAPTAIN.

BOTH legs were shattered, and his arm was gone;
He had a bloody bullet in his side.
They brought him in; and gasping, "Carry on"—
He nodded to us, smiling, as he died.

AFTERWARDS.

THE day Joe killed a German he was proud.
He held his head up and his voice was loud
In giving details to an envious crowd.

But, later, when old Joe, alone, I met,
Said he, "I'm glad I slew that brute, and yet—
The way he looked....God! Jim, I can't forget."

"Why, mate," said I, "you did your duty well,
I wish I had as fine a tale to tell."
Joe shook his head and answered, "War is Hell."

IN HOSPITAL.

SHE never wanted me to go at all,
And set her face against it from the first.
She said the British Nation couldn't fall,
Even suppose the Germans did their worst!
And there was other chaps to fight it out,
Who hadn't wives and kids to leave behind—
That I'd get killed she hadn't any doubt,
Or come home crippled,—maybe crazed, or blind.

But I was set on doing my proper bit,
God knows I done it, too, without a fear,
Up to the blasted minute I got hit
And knew no more; t'was then they brought me here . . .
A man without his legs ain't good for much,
And so I'm out of it for once and all;
A fighting Britain has no use for such;
She needs sound men to answer to her call.

I'm glad I went and done my little bit ;
Nothing I grudge—and more I'd like to do.
Why, often, when I'm looking back on it,
I wonder if the whole blamed thing was true.
Or just a dream !—until, Oh God, I see
My blighted self, returning home from here,
To wife and kids !....what will she think of me,
Whose bit of soldiering has cost so dear ?

She never wanted me to go at all—
And set her face against it from the start.
She always held I hadn't any call
To volunteer,—and, now, I've broke her heart.
Sometimes I lie and wonder what she'll say
When first she sees my bloomin' legs are gone—
And yet,—if I could have them back to-day
I'd go again and help to Carry On !

THE MOTHER.

MY SON was prisoned over there
In Germany; and wounded sore—
The papers said. I knew no more.

But, night and day, I prayed one prayer,
That God, Who breaks the captive's chain,
Would loose my dear one's bonds of pain.

Then, one still dawn, he came to me,
As in a dream, I saw him stand
And felt his touch upon my hand.

"Fret not;" he said, "for I am free.
The prison doors have opened wide."
That day came news. My boy had died.

THE MYSTIC.

THEY'RE with us yet! They're with us yet!
Those spirits that have fled—
Think you, in Heaven, they could forget
The End to which our souls are set,
By Right and Honour led?

Nay, often in the thick of things,
I've felt them overhead—
And, through the deepest hell of things,
They've carried me on rushing wings,
Those Hosts of living Dead.

MEETING AGAIN.

SURE it's not myself will be talkin' War to h
when he comes back again,
Not one word will I be after tellin' him of the lonelin
or the pain—
All I'll be carin' for at all is just to be lookin'
his face
An' to be layin' my poor moidher'd head down to
again in the old place,
With his strong arms holdin' me close at last, an'
strokin' my hair, the while
The peace of heaven an' the glory of earth will
comin' back with his smile !

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